

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6995
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USINT HAVANA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, DM, NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS BENIN

REF: STATE 48804

1. MARCH 7, 1978, PUNCH CARRIED FRONT PAGE ARTICLE ENTITLED
"RUSSIANS "INVADE" BENIN: CHINESE, CUBANS ALSO TROOP IN." ARTICLE
WRITTEN BY NEWS EDITOR WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM A TRIP TO
COTONOU. HIGHLIGHTS OF ARTICLE INCLUDE FOLLOWING POINTS:

- GIGANTIC RUSSIAN BUILD UP NOW GOING ON IN BENIN;
- SOVIET WARSHIPS AND SUBMARINES ARE NOW STATIONED IN
BENINOIS WATERS;

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-- BENIN IS "FILLED" WITH RUSSIANS, CUBANS AND CHINESE;
--AEROFLOT NOW RUNS REGULAR DIRECT FLIGHTS MOSCOW TO
COTONOU AND SOVIET OFFICIALS COMING TO WEST AFRICA GENERALLY
FLY TO COTONOU AND GO BY ROAD TO OTHER COUNTRIES.

2. ARTICLE CONCLUDED, "THE PURPOSE OF THE SOVIET BUILD UP WAS
NOT IMMEDIATELY KNOWN, PARTICULARLY WHEN IT IS CONSIDERED THAT

THE STRENGTH OF THE BENINOIS ARMED FORCES IS PUT AT ABOUT 3,000. DIPLOMATIC SOURCES, HOWEVER, SEE THE ARMS BUILD UP AS A MATTER OF CONCERN FOR NIGERIA, WHICH IS HER CLOSET NEIGHBOR."

3. COMMENT: PUCH, LARGEST PRIVATELY OWNED PAPER IN NIGERIA, IS NOTED FOR ITS SENSATIONAL ARTICLES AND FEATURES WHICH INCLUDE POLITICAL CARTOONS, CHEESECAKE PICTURES AS WELL AS INTERESTING POLITICAL COMMENTARY. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THIS PIECE FALLS INTO THE CATEGORY OF SENSATIONAL ARTICLES, BUT IT MAY WELL HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY SOME WHO WANTED TO ALERT PEOPLE TO A SITUATION THEY FOUND SOMEWHAT DISTURBING. IN ANY EVENT IT IS THE FIRST ARTICLE ON THE FOREIGN PRESENCE IN BENIN THAT WE HAVE SEEN IN OVER NINE MONTHS.

4. WE HAVE NOTED THAT THERE IS SOME SUSPICION AND CONCERN BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OF USSR AND CUBAN ACTIVITIES IN BENIN AS WELL AS THE RADICAL ORIENTATION OF THE KEREKOU REGIME. EASUM

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